

Flowers of the Feast

Botanical Garden celebrates Dias de los Muertos

SHAUNA TUCKER

ST. CROIX — The Mexican tradition Dias de los Muertos, also known as Day of the Dead, was recognized Saturday at the St. George Village Botanical Garden, as part of the holiday in Mexico and other Hispanic nations.

Presenter and SGVVBG Director David Hamada, who is of Mexican descent, shared the importance of the holiday with an audience of approximately 20 people to dispel myths associated with the religious celebration.

"People tend to focus on the skulls but I believe that it is a floral tradition," Hamada said. "Plants play an important role in culture and this is why my presentation is called Flowers of the Feast."

He then went into a detailed slide show that depicted skeletons, food and flowers that were used to decorate the altar, one of the most significant aspects of Dias de los Muertos.

"Mexican-Americans tend to roll Dias de los Muertos into Halloween," Hamada said. "This makes the tradition seem scary rather than celebratory."

Hamada also shared a brief history of Day of the Dead, explaining that a melting pot of cultures contributed to the celebration of today.

"Day of the Dead is a hybrid of the beliefs of the European missionaries and native Indians," he said.

Hamada explained that historically, the native Indians would bury their dead with useful items for a four-year trial, which the dead would endure after they had passed. The Indians believed warriors and women who died in childbirth were the only ones primarily sent to the highest celestial. An altar would be made for those who died under other circum-



David Hamada describes an altar built to guide his grandmother during the Flowers of the Feast presentation at the St. George Village Botanical Garden on Saturday in recognition of Dias de los Muertos, also known as Day of the Dead.

Shauna Tucker

stances and honored every year on Dias de los Muertos.

According to Hamada, the altar was constructed in tiers and consisted of a religious figure such as God or the Virgin Mary at the top, then remnants or items belonging to the deceased and finally the offerings at the bottom.

During his presentation, Hama-

da displayed an altar constructed to honor his deceased grandmother. It included offerings of fruit and sweet items that she enjoyed during her lifetime.

"The altar would include offerings that would invite the spirit to come and spend time with you," he said, adding that flowers are important to the altar, providing

smells and colors to guide the spirits.

The offering of food and water provide essence to the spirits, Hamada said, and then the family and friends share the food that was offered to celebrate.

The afternoon of Dias de los Muertos is used to clean and decorate the graves of the loved ones.

"Here marigolds are extremely important," Hamada said, emphasizing the smell and color that the flower adds to the celebration.

Additionally, sweets rich in sugar and paper crafts all play a cultural role in Dias de los Muertos, according to Hamada.

Audience members were thrilled with the presentation and excited to learn something new.

"It was very educational and colorful," Jacqueline Sickinger said. "It gives you a different perspective of honoring the dead."

Sickinger shared her experience with similar traditions in her travels to Egypt.

"In Egypt, they too bury the dead with personal items and honor them," she said.

Her husband and president of the board of governors for the garden, Larry Sickinger, thought it was interesting and had no idea that the skeletons were so significant and traditional.

According to Hamada, skeletal figures play a big role in the celebrations and should not be viewed as morbid but as a transitory symbol.

Native Mexican Elena Leroux said the day's presentation was accurate and a reinforcement of what she grew up with.

"Every region of Mexico has their own variations of Day of the Dead with traditional food, but with their own ingredients and spices," she said.

Leroux also said the day is celebratory but can be emotional, adding that the tradition itself is "very Catholic."

Hamada also mentioned in his presentation that missionaries from Europe saw Day of the Dead as resembling All Saints Day and All Souls Day, both of which are rooted in Catholic traditions.

Christensen, EDA delegation participate in investment summit

SHAUNA TUCKER

ST. CROIX — A delegation from the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority and Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen recently attended the launching of President Barack Obama's Select USA initiative on Oct. 31, aimed at bringing jobs and investment from around the world to the United States, according to an EDA statement.

Christensen attended the event to meet investors and business leaders, and to greet the Virgin Islands delegation from the EDA.

"It was important to be there as President Obama pushed for more jobs to come to our country and it was great to support the Virgin Islands government's push to be a part of this important initiative for the future of the country and our islands," Christensen said.

The event offered the EDA delegation an opportunity to meet and interact with international and domestic investors and high-level corporate business executives to promote the investment opportunities available under EDA's tax incentive programs.

EDA Chief Executive Officer

Percival Clouden was expected to seek additional financial support for the various lending programs within the Government Development Bank from high-level senior White House officials who were expected to be in attendance, according to the statement.

"We are delighted that VIEDA is given the opportunity to participate in such an exciting summit to discuss investment opportunities for the territory with potential and domestic and international investors," Clouden said.

As a sponsor of the luncheon event through The Pont Group,

the EDA had the opportunity to make a more tailored pitch to global investors, according to the statement.

This was a major promotional opportunity for the territory, as more than 1,000 participants were expected to include 300 companies and professional services organizations and 700 representatives from economic development agencies, the EDA stated.

The Select USA 2013 Investment Summit is part of a U.S. government-wide initiative to promote direct investment in the United States, intended to connect state, territorial and local

economic development organizations. It is a program within the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration.

Select USA provides information assistance to the global investment community that serves as an advice board for investors, and advocates for U.S. cities, states and regions competing for global investment. Its mission is to prioritize foreign investment that creates jobs, be a single point of contact for investors looking to bring jobs and production to the U.S., and to coordinate support for states and localities to attract investment, according to the statement.